Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

MHR Connections

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Rights Rally Team heads to northern schools

Five members of the Commission staff packed up their truck and headed to four middle schools in Thompson and The Pas. From left to right: Jesse Rock, Loraine Lambert, Pat Daniels, Pam Roberts and Ryan Redpath. *(Full story on page 2.)*

Joan Braun leads Manitoba Human Rights Commission

The Manitoba Human Rights Board of Commissioner's Vice-Chairperson Yvonne Peters is pleased to announce the selection of Joan Braun as the new Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. Ms Braun's career has been devoted to public interest law and equality issues and has a strong commitment to social justice.

"Manitobans have a strong Human Rights Commission with its staff doing the full scope of work from investigation to mediation to awareness," says Ms Braun. "I am looking forward to building on what is already here."

Joan Braun is a British Columbia lawyer, social worker and mediator. For the past ten years she has worked in the public interest law sector, both leading research and policy projects and working in senior management in the non-profit sector. One of Ms Braun's recent accomplishments was to oversee the development and operation of the first legal aid clinic in Western Canada which exclusively provides services for vulnerable and "at risk" older adults. She is the Vice-Chair of the Canadian Bar Association's Alternate Dispute Resolution national section and is the Co-Chair for one of the Association on Conflict Resolution's subsections.

Ms. Braun is looking forward to ensuring that the work done by the Commission continues and that this work is widely understood by the public.

"Protection of human rights has made a difference in the lives of many people. However, discrimination continues to exist in Manitoba and throughout the country and work still remains to be done."

The Rights Connection
by Joan Braun - Executive Director

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission has often been asked where the line is between hate speech and freedom of expression. We have responded by stating that the line is a fine one, and only the courts, and in some cases human rights tribunals and appeals that follow, can determine its width. This line is drawn on a case by case basis.

On February 27, 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled on Bill Whatcott's anti-gay fliers. The fliers denounced homosexuals and referred to gay men as sodomites and pedophiles. A Saskatchewan Human Rights Tribunal determined that these pamphlets constituted "hate speech". This decision was appealed to the SCC.

The SCC decision began with the following sentence by Justice Rothstein. "All rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are subject to reasonable limitation." In the decision and discussion that followed, the court clarified where the line should be drawn. Prohibitions in human rights legislation are intended to prevent extreme expressions of hate that may incite others to discriminate against protected groups. Speech is not prohibited merely because it is offensive. However, when it exposes a group to hatred it crosses the line. The SCC examined four fliers distributed by Mr. Whatcott and determined two of them constituted hate speech and two did not.

In its ruling the SCC also struck down wording in the Saskatchewan *Human Rights Code*, determining that preventing freedom of expression based on whether the words *"ridicules, belittles, or otherwise affronts the dignity of a person"* is unconstitutional. This phrase does not exist in Manitoba's *Human Rights Code*. Section 18 of Manitoba's Code prohibits publications that "incites, advocates or counsels discrimination" of any protected ground, which includes sexual orientation.

Protectors of Canada's freedom of expression can be assured that a very high standard has been set for what qualifies as hatred. For those who believe that hate speech protections are essential to human rights, the SCC has found a balance that has made the difference very clear.

Beatrice Watson to receive Lifetime Achievement Award

The Commission's Outreach and Liaison officer Beatrice Watson is the 2013 recipient of the Eira "Babs" Friesen Lifetime Achievement Award. The Award honours women, who like "Babs" have demonstrated courage, persistence and have made a unique contribution to women's equality. The Award is supported by the YMCA YWCA of Winnipeg and the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council. Beatrice will be honoured at the YWCA Women of Distinction event in Winnipeg on May 1, 2013. The Commission staff and Board congratulate Beatrice on her latest achievement.

Northern Rights Rallies energize students

According to the staff of the Human Rights Commission who comprised the Rights Rally team, their highly successful visit to four northern schools left them exhausted and exhilarated.

The team left Sunday March 17, one day early, to avoid the impending snow storm that hit southern Manitoba on Monday morning. "Despite the last minute change in travel plans, everything went off without a hitch," says Pam Roberts, one of the team leaders.

The Rights Rally team visited École Riverside School, and Deerwood School in Thompson, Opaskwayak Oscar Lathlin School and The Pas École Scott Bateman Middle School.

The students took part in two workshops before playing the "Rights Race", a new game combining Angry Birds, Charades, Trivial Pursuit and a race around a life sized game board using giant dice. The game tested everyone's human rights knowledge. According to Ms Roberts, "The kids loved seeing their teachers having to answer tough questions."

Here are some of the personal highlights of the team:
Ryan Redpath: "A student went out of her way to personally thank me and gave me a high five.

Jesse Rock: "One student asked for advice with a bullying scenario."

Lorraine Lambert: "Reaching out to a student who had not been very involved during the Angry Bird game. Got the biggest smile back."

Pat Daniels: "Getting personally thanked by the teachers from Oscar Lathlin and Principal Scott Bateman for coming and talking to the kids."

Pam Roberts: "A teacher from Riverside blowing over the dice."

Marjorie Nabess: "The amazing enthusiasm."

Canadian Human Rights Agencies call for action

Earlier this month, leading up to International Women's Day on March 8, Barbara Hall, President of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies (CASHRA), announced that the Association has released a motion addressed to the Government of Canada.

The motion, unanimously passed by CASHRA members, including the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, urges the Government to work with Aboriginal peoples' organizations to develop and implement a national action plan. The plan would focus urgent attention on addressing and preventing the root causes of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, including poverty and systemic discrimination. It further calls on the Government to establish an independent and inclusive inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

"We hear almost daily how Aboriginal women and girls continue to bear a persistent and disproportionate burden of violence," commented President Barbara Hall. "I am pleased that the Ontario Human Rights Commission as a member of CASHRA, fully endorses CASHRA's strong stand pushing the federal Government to urgently address this very disturbing situation."

According to Statistics Canada, Aboriginal women in Canada are seven times more likely to be murdered than non-Aboriginal women. The Native Women's Association of Canada reports that, over the past 30 years, an alarming number of Aboriginal women and girls have gone missing or have been found murdered in communities across Canada. Most of these cases remain unsolved.

CASHRA was established in 1972 as an umbrella organization for the federal, provincial and territorial human rights commissions. Since its inception, CASHRA continues to provide opportunities for members to exchange information about human rights laws in Canada. CASHRA also undertakes public education projects that promote and advocate for human rights in Canada and abroad.

Survey reveals a need for human rights training

There is a high need for training of staff and Boards of Community-Based Organizations (CBO'S) in Winnipeg. According to a survey conducted by Healthy Hive Consulting a significant majority of CBOs (78%) feel their work or mandate relates directly to promoting and protecting human rights of citizens in daily life, nearly half of CBOs rate their level of knowledge about Manitoba's *Human Rights Code* as being low.

According to the survey, over half (55%) of the CBOs are asked by their clients or community members to assist them in recognizing and resolving discriminatory situations they are experiencing.

The entire survey can be read on the Commission's website www.manitobahumanrights.ca.